



Exploring the possibilities for promoting staffs' participation in
international activities
Case Vocational College Lappia

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ABSTRACT

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| <p>The objective of this study was to explore the possibilities for promoting the staffs' participation in international activities in Vocational College Lappia. The research questions of the thesis seek to reveal the barriers to participation in international activities and further, find the potential and prospective methods to promote the participation. Moreover, the current stage and further development of internationalization in Lappia were disclosed. The commissioner of the thesis research is Vocational College Lappia.</p> <p>The theoretical framework was built upon the literature and previous research of the internationalization of VET in Europe, in Finland and in Lappia. The theory consists of the European strategic framework for VET and the implementation of it in Finland. Furthermore, the current stage and future prospects of internationalization are elements of the theoretical framework of the study.</p> <p>An empirical study was accomplished by a questionnaire survey and participant observation. The results were analyzed accordingly by drawing from the theoretical framework of this research and the empirical data.</p> <p>The research indicates that the stage of internationalization in Lappia was mostly recognized by student and staff mobility. Functional collaboration with foreign partners and active project work were disclosed. Challenges and obstacles for participation in international activities were adduced. The main findings revealing obstacles of the participation in internationalization were stated as the lack of resources and the shortage of motivation and possibilities among the respondents. In addition, inadequate language skills among the staff were enounced. Furthermore, the lack of support from management and the shortage of financing were stated as a barrier for participation. The main findings for promoting the staffs' participation in international activities were stated as increasing the dissemination of the possibilities for participation. Moreover, improving the guidance for participation was emphasized. Furthermore, adequate resources for participation and more positive attitude towards internationalization were pointed out. For further development in internationalization, Lappia's internationalization strategy should include the accurate future prospects and objectives.</p> |
| Keywords: internationalization of VET, international competencies of staff in VET, promoting internationalization of VET |

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| CIMO | International Mobility Center |
| ECVET | European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training |
| EFQM | European Quality Foundation Model |
| EFVET | European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| EQF | European Qualifications Framework |
| EU | The European Union |
| FNBE | Finnish National Board of Education |
| IVETA | International Vocational Education and Training Association |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |

FIGURES

Figure 1. International mobility in Lappia, 2009 – 2012

1 INTRODUCTION

The background and motivation information for this research are discussed here to illustrate the main factors that generate the need for this research and that have an influence on the research topic. Moreover, the case organization, vocational college Lappia, is presented. In addition, the research objectives and questions are defined and the structure of the thesis is explained.

1.1 Background and motivation

The aim of this research is to explore the possibilities for promoting staffs' participation into international activities. In order to accomplish this challenging task, the prerequisites and the barriers in this involvement are to be disclosed.

International cooperation and mobility are the central tools in educational development in Finland. Internationalization has also been promoted as a key area in the Development Plan for Education and Research 2011-2016 (hereinafter Education and Research 2011-2016) published by Ministry of Education and Culture in December 2011. These Plans are published every fourth year. According to the latest Plan for Education and Research, the Government has lined out that internationalization is an essential part of VET providers. Moreover, the teachers and management of the institutions will develop their competencies and education by cooperation with their international partners. The aim is to improve comparability of vocational competencies at the European level. The plan maintains that "The aim is to increase annual mobility of students in VET by 30 % and staff by 20 % during the plan period. Moreover, the aim is to take an active part in the European educational cooperation and to engage more with countries outside the European Union." Especially the management and teachers will strengthen and develop their teaching competencies by participation in international projects. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 41.)

Students of today in VET in Finland are significantly aware of international environments, i.e. several of them have the so called 'global attitude'. An increasing number of students

have experience travelling abroad e.g. for holidays. The development of technology enables the connections worldwide, e.g. through Skype, Facebook, e-learning. Thus, the world is diminishing in size. A considerable number of vocational students plan to have their traineeship periods, included in their study programs, abroad. Students are aware of the added value of international and professional competences they will gain during these periods. Lappia should consider this fact in order to stay competitive in educational offerings in Finland. Mobility of experts, i.e. teachers and staff, has been increasing during the past few years. This statement will be justified by statistical information presented in the theoretical framework of this thesis. Mobility comprises work placements, teaching exchange and trips related to development projects or preparatory visits. These mobility periods promote the possibilities for students' mobility by having contacts abroad and organizing the placements for students. Moreover, the experts are the most valuable asset to motivate the students to participate in international activities of Lappia, e.g. on-the-job learning period abroad, international seminars and visits in Lappia, tutoring foreign students studying or having their on-the-job-learning periods in the college.

Vocational education and training (hereinafter VET) has already a long history in international cooperation. Currently, most vocational colleges have various kinds of international activities. In most colleges, these activities include students' international on-the-job-learning periods, and on the reciprocal basis Finnish vocational colleges receive greater number of foreign students as students and trainees. There are many other possibilities in vocational colleges in order to internationalize their operations besides student- and teacher exchange, e.g. collaboration in international development projects, visits from foreign partner organization and participation in international conferences. A core objective in international operations is to promote the mobility of the students and staff in vocational education and at the same time developing their international skills and competencies. The purpose of internationalization in VET is to provide students with abilities to operate and work successfully in international labor markets and multi-cultural society. Furthermore, internationalization of VET enables the readiness to adapt to the changes caused by globalization in economic life. Language skills and tolerances of different cultures are essential skills in internationalization. Moreover, competitiveness of education and economic life are promoted by internationalization.

Another important objective of internationalization is to improve the quality and attractiveness of the education cooperation with working life. An acknowledgement of qualifications of VET in international cooperation is also one of the objectives in international operations. With this acknowledgement the competitiveness of Finnish education and working life will be strengthened in international environments in the future. Globalization and expanding integration in Europe increase mobility and competitiveness of the working life with high requirements for skills. Language skills and knowledge of foreign cultures is an important asset in working life and the requirements of these skills will be increased in the future. Thus, vocational education has a significant role in developing the abilities of internationalization.

My personal and professional involvement in this research is a strong motivational factor, because I work as an international relations coordinator in the vocational college Lappia. The development of international operations at the moment and in the future in this educational environment is one of my responsibilities and the main tasks in Lappia as a coordinator.

1.2 Case organization and its international operations

Vocational College Lappia, hereinafter Lappia, provides vocational upper secondary education. The main objective is to provide students with good professional knowledge and competence to be employed by themselves or by national or international employers. The college is situated in Finnish Lapland on the Swedish border. (Vocational College Lappia 2011, 1.) Lappia offers education in five different fields of study, i.e. Nature, Culture, Technology, Service, and Social and Health Care, and the students are able to study in 50 different study programs obtaining 30 different vocational qualifications. (Vocational College Lappia 2011a, 1.)

International operations in the college are based on students and experts, i.e. teacher and staff mobility projects and network projects with foreign partners and also with other Finnish vocational colleges. The staff in this research includes, besides teachers, the

administrative personnel of the college, i.e. managers, student secretaries, student counselors and projects workers.

The aim of international operations in Lappia, according to the internationalization strategy of the college, is to increase the amount of students' and experts' on-the-job learning and working life periods abroad. The vision of this strategy is to see Lappia as a trustworthy and international partner, whose students and staffs have adequate ability to operate skillfully in the future international environment. Another important aim is to increase and deepen the cooperation with partners in international projects by strengthening the cooperation in the existing and future networks. The internationalization team of the college is responsible for internationalization according to the strategy. The strategy and Lappia's present stage of internationalization will be presented in-depth in chapter 2.3.

The cooperation in internationalization of Lappia mainly takes place in Europe; therefore the focus of the research is at the European level. An essential factor in order to enhance the internationalization of the college is to motivate the staff to participate in international activities. Exploring the staffs' possibilities for more active participation in internationalization is the specific objective of this thesis.

1.3 Research objectives and questions

The research topic in my thesis is the international mobility of the staff in vocational college Lappia. The research objective in this case is to explore the possibilities of staffs in Lappia for improving participation in international activities. These activities could be e.g. mobility-programs for students and staff, international projects, international meetings and visitors in Lappia as well as language and cultural courses for students and staff. Development of the professional international competencies of the staffs' enables the college to expand the participation of the staff and the students in international activities and projects. By this facilitation Lappia is able to have one good asset in competition in vocational education in Finland since the strategy of the college implies that international operations are an integral part of the vocational studies. According to that strategy, Lappia is an appealing international educator in the economic area of Northern Finland.

Argued by White (2009, 97), the research should be driven by the desire to answer particular questions, not by preferences for particular methods of data collection and analysis. In this research the particular questions will be solving the problem of why so few members of the staff do not participate in international operations with the objective for promoting teacher and staff participation in international activities in Lappia. During 2012, a total of 88 members of Lappia's staff participated in international mobility (Korkala 2013, 37). This accounts for 23 % of the staff. The objective is to increase the staff mobility 20 % by 2016 according to Education and Research 2011 - 2016. At present, there is no numeric or percentual objectives for the mobility indicators presented in the internationalization strategy of Lappia. However, the aim for increasing the mobility in Lappia is topical according to the Education and Research 2011 - 2016, which forms the guidelines also for Lappia's operations.

The research questions presented below are put forward in line with the objectives of this thesis.

1. What are the barriers, if any, hindering the participation of staff in international activities of Lappia?
2. How can the motivation of staff participation in international activities in Lappia be increased?

Answers to the first research question seek to discover the barriers to active participation in international activities among the staff of the college. The second research question pursues the potential and prospective methods to increase the participation of the staff into internationalization of the college. Furthermore, in this research the current situation and suggestions for further development of internationalization of Lappia are disclosed.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

An overview of the study is presented in the first chapter, where the background, motivation and case organization of the study are presented. The objectives and research questions are also clarified in the first chapter. The theoretical framework is presented in chapter 2. In chapter 3, the research methodology and techniques for the study are defined. It is also explained how the data and information is collected, what instruments are used and how the data is analysed. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the analysis and discussion of the data. Finally chapter 5 concludes the thesis.

2 INTERNATIONALIZATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN EUROPE, IN FINLAND AND IN LAPPIA

The theoretical framework in this work is based on the theories and results of the previous research and publications of internationalization in vocational education and training (hereinafter VET) in Europe and in Finland. In chapter 2.1, European frameworks for VET will be presented. Furthermore, in chapter 2.3 the influence of European frameworks, results of national previous research, statistical information and internationalization of Finnish vocational education will be discussed. Chapter 2.4 will concentrate on the current situation in Lappia in accordance with the theories, strategies and previous research conclusions presented in this theoretical framework. In the following paragraphs the theoretical framework is defined and made relevant for this thesis.

According to Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill (2003, 44), critical literature review will form the foundation on which the research is built. Therefore, it is necessary to establish what research has been published in the chosen area. The items to be read and discussed will enhance the knowledge of the subject to be researched and thus, help to clarify the research questions further. There are two major reasons for reviewing relevant literature. Firstly, preliminary search helps to generate and refine the research ideas. Secondly, review gives the awareness of the current state of knowledge in the subject. The reviewing also provides the information about how research fits in this wider context (Saunders et al. 2003, 44.) Hereafter the current state of knowledge in internationalization of VET is presented, and moreover this research is brought forward in a wider context of internationalization in vocational education training.

2.1 European strategic framework for vocational education and training

The European Union defines the framework of policy for development of educational systems. In 2000, the cooperation in European educational and training systems started by adopting the Lisbon strategy. “European framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning as a key measure in Europe’s response to globalization and the shift to knowledge-based economies, and emphasized that people are the Europe’s main asset.” (European Union 2006.) Improving the key competencies of individuals is a

major objective of all education and training systems. Furthermore, for the European ever-changing economy, these individual competences need to be continuously updated through lifelong learning.

The Commission collaborates together with the EU governments to strengthen VET across Europe. The collaboration is based on the Copenhagen Process. This process was introduced in 2002 in Copenhagen and the initiative for it was taken by the European Commission. The objective of this Process is to improve the performance, attractiveness and quality of VET and promote the mobility of students and trainers in VET by enhancing the European collaboration. From a wider perspective the aim of the Process is to promote the development of the European labor markets and complement the area of the European high-level education. Attaining these objectives is based on voluntary collaboration of EU Member States including labor market organizations. (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training & European Commission 2002.)

According to Copenhagen Declaration (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training & European Commission 2002), the following four priorities, which increase the voluntary cooperation in VET and training, are presented:

- 1) “European dimension: strengthening closer cooperation within European VET in order to facilitate and promote mobility and the development of inter-institutional cooperation, partnerships and other transnational initiatives. With these measures the objective is to raise the profile of the European education and training area internationally.”
- 2) “Transparency, information and guidance: increasing transparency in VET and training through the implementation of existing information tools such as the European CV, Certificate and Diploma Supplements, the Common European framework of reference for languages, and the Europass into one single framework. Strengthening policies and practices that support information, guidance and counseling in the Member States. This corroboration operates at all levels of education, training and employment, especially on issues concerning admittance to learning, VET. The transferability and recognition

of competences and qualifications improves the occupational and geographical mobility of European citizens.”

- 3) “Recognition of competences and qualifications: scrutinizing how transparency, transferability, comparability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels of study, could be advanced by developing reference levels, common principles and tools for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for VET. Further, the aim is increasing support to the development of competences and qualifications at field-specific level, by reinforcing collaboration and co-ordination involving the partners at same field of study. Furthermore, this recognition pursues developing common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the objective of ensuring better compatibility between national methods and modes and at different levels of study.”
- 4) “Quality assurance: promoting cooperation in quality assurance with exchange of models and methods as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training. Further, consider the needs of further training for teachers and trainers within all forms of VET.”

After adoption the Copenhagen process the central focus of the European collaboration has been facilitating transparency and comparability of qualifications. European Qualifications Framework (hereinafter EQF) was agreed on in 2008 by European vocational institutes. EQF is a common European reference system, which enables the connection and comparison of national educational systems and frame reference of qualifications in different countries. EQF is the basis for development of European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (hereinafter ECVET). In 2009, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union recommended elaborating a credit system for VET (European Centre for Development and Vocational Training 2012, 60). ECVET promotes mobility and the comparison of vocational qualifications aims to facilitate the validation, recognition and accumulation of work-related skills and knowledge acquired during a stay in another country for practical training or studies. It ensures that these international experiences contribute to vocational qualifications. ECVET aims for better compatibility

between the different vocational education and training (VET) systems and their qualifications in Europe. (European Commission 2014.) One of the main preconditions in order to enable the implementation of ECVET is that qualifications, standards, programs, curricula and assessment focus on learning outcomes (Cedefop 2012, 60). The learning outcomes mean statements of what a student/learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence (FNBE 2012, 15).

According to Rauner (2008, 90), the goals defined for ECVET in the realization of the Copenhagen Process were presented as

- “Improving transfer of the results of learning between and within national educational systems and further between formal, non-formal and informal skills.
 - Facilitating of the accumulation of educational, training and qualification units with a partial or full qualification in their results irrespective of the purpose for which the learning has taken place.
 - Encouraging transparency and the mutual recognition between learning processes and results.
 - Improving mobility in learning processes and facilitating of vocational mobility.”
- (Rauner 2008, 90.)

ECVET will be reviewed and its benefits for VET will be presented more accurately perceiving the national state of implementation in chapter 2.2.1. Further, this national state of implementation regulates also Lappia’s process for the realization of ECVET.

The future objectives of European vocational education were presented in The Bruges Communiqué published in December 2010. The communiqué presents the objectives both for national development and European cooperation in vocational education. The essential sectors of this communiqué are introduced as lifelong learning, increasing of mobility, quality of education, education of groups with special needs, and creative, innovative and entrepreneurial thinking in education. (European Commission 2010.) The Communiqué presents the modern educational systems, which meet the requirements of the constantly changing working life. Changing and developing the educational systems at the European

level needs the common vision for the future as well as motivation and skills to react on that. By strengthening the collaboration between the actors of VET in the European educational field, this vision will be achieved.

The EU Member States and the European Commission strengthened their cooperation in 2009 by acknowledging the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) up until 2020. This framework emphasizes rethinking education to provide the needed individual key competences to a changing economy. (European Commission 2012.) As a result of this approved strategic framework, the new strategy for education was disclosed. Moreover, according to ET 2020, the objective for lifelong learning participation is 15 % of the population aged 25-64 by 2020. (Cedefop 2012, 41.)

The European Commission presented the new strategy in November 2012 for rethinking education. The unemployment rate of young people in the European Union is nearly 23 % and at the same time there are over 2 million vacant positions to be posted. The new way of thinking how to provide the skills labor markets need in Europe, is required. Currently, strict retrenchments and cuts of education budgets make the situation increasingly challenging. By means of this strategy, the member countries are encouraged to take immediate measures to ensure that young people acquire the knowledge and skills needed in current working life. With these measures, the member countries could reach the national growth and employment objectives. According to this strategy, the focus is on activating language studies, recognizing and validating the qualifications, utilizing technology and internet in education and active network cooperation. (European Commission 2012.) Managing the objectives in the strategy, teaching staff have a significant role in this process. Hence, wider and innovative perspective as well as international motivation and competencies to rethink the education are essential.

According to European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (2013, 40) VET is not just developing knowledge, skills and competences, which forms human capital. VET is also developing social, cultural and identity. Together they form a personal capital, which enables learning and subsequently the using of acquired skills. Capability is not just

knowledge, but how to utilize the knowledge. VET is not only influencing on skills, but also on behavior. Including the internationalization in personal capital is essential and further necessary today and especially in the future.

The European frameworks and strategies, presented above, give the significance for the cooperation in vocational education at the European level. Contemporaneously, the motivation for this research is assigned. In order to cooperate at the European level, competencies and skills for the cooperation should be acquired. The internationalization of vocational education is a prerequisite to act successfully according to the objectives issued by the European framework for vocational education. The international competencies and motivation of staffs are the key factors for the implementation of internationalization in VET.

2.2 Internationalization of vocational education and training in Finland in European educational framework

The European framework defines also the national framework for development of vocational education. The objectives agreed on the European level are implemented nationally by Finnish legislations and prevailing practices abiding by voluntariness, learning from other member countries and sharing good practices with each other.

Research conducted and publications by the Finnish National Board of Education (hereinafter FNBE), the Ministry of Education and Culture and the International Mobility Centre (hereinafter CIMO) define principally the present state of the internationalization processes of vocational education in Finland as well as the future prospects for development of these processes. Furthermore, these organizations operate as supporters for vocational institutes in their international activities; they offer expert help for implementing and coordinating international projects. Moreover, they grant funding to international projects and conferences organized by educational institutes. The governmental subsidy has a significant impact on development of international operations of VET also outside of Europe and the Nordic countries. By diminishing the subsidy, the operations will decrease particularly in those institutes with financing difficulties.

The definition of the present stage and future prospects of internationalization in Finland is based on the European strategic framework for education and training. This information forms a national theoretical framework in this research. In addition, statistical information by CIMO of the staff and student mobility is used to enable contemplating the changes and development of internationalization in context of mobility.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2011-2016, 41), internationalization is stated an essential part of Finnish VET and therefore international activities in education will be promoted. International cooperation and mobility are central tools in educational development. Several students have international studies or/and periods as a part of their studies, e.g. training periods and language courses abroad. As a development plan the teachers and staff of vocational education develop their international competencies in order to strengthen international project work and hence internationalization of the vocational institutions. Furthermore, the comparability of vocational competences in Europe will be improved and thereby the mobility of vocational students and developments of the European labor market will be promoted. The plan is based on the objectives set for the development of education and science policy in Finland considering principles and objectives of Copenhagen process and ET 2020. Therefore, this development plan is perceived as a guideline for future prospects and development activity in vocational education.

2.2.1 Supporting role of the Finnish National Board of Education in internationalization of vocational education

FNBE promotes internationalization of vocational education in compliance with national educational policy. The Board decides the objectives of internationalization for curricula and bases of degrees. Furthermore, the Board disseminates information, provides support, instructions and governmental awards for international activities and projects of vocational institutions. Annually FNBE subsidizes vocational institutes with grants for international developing projects. The publications by FNBE, which supports the theoretical framework of this research, are presented hereafter.

Since 1980, the development of internationalization in vocational education has been an objective in national strategies and development plans of development. Nevertheless, after joining the European Union in the mid1990, internationalization of vocational education was perceived systematically and the development started. The mission of vocational education is to educate skillful professionals also to international working life, hence the aims of internationalization has been taken into consideration in basis of vocational qualifications. Skills and competencies needed in international working life, as language and cultural competencies, is included into the requirements of professional skills and evaluation criteria of vocational qualifications and training programs. (Koramo 2012, 6-7.)

According to Koramo (2012, 8), the emphasis of present state of promoting internationalization is organizing international on-the-job-learning periods in Europe. This is the established activity in international operations in many Finnish vocational institutes. Furthermore, Koramo states that although international activities have been developing considerably, resources in supporting internationalization have not been adequate. In order to ensure the development of internationalization of vocational education, the strategies and operations plans should include the resources, principles and focuses for international operations. Moreover, the participation and engagement of management, staffs and students should be emphasized during the process of developing the internationalization of the institute. In addition, the report indicates that networking in the internationalization of vocational education is essential and cost-effective way to collaborate in international projects. As a result, collaboration in networks has increased student and staff mobility as well as organizing the mobility operations in vocational institutes. (Koramo 2012, 8–10.) Research of the importance of networking in internationalization was published by the Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation (CIMO) in 2010. The results of this research will be presented in chapter 2.2.2.

Although the development of internationalization of VET is successful for many educational institutes, the challenges of internationalization of institutes are noticed to be in teacher expert exchange and further integration of internationalization into pedagogy. (FNBE & CIMO & HAMK 2009, 7).When contemplating the organizational learning and

growth, the development of teachers' skills and competencies are noticed as a major factor (FNBE & CIMO & HAMK 2009, 23).

Above mentioned research discloses that for operating successfully in international activities, the commitment and motivation of the management and entire personnel was found to be a very important factor. Furthermore, attitudes of the personnel were considered significant, positive attitude was transferred to the students encouraging the participation in international activities. (FNBE & CIMO & HAMK 2009, 20.) The prerequisites for teacher mobility were adequate financing for the period, sufficient language skills and possibility for substitute at work. Moreover, international activities should be resourced and included in the budget. In addition, internationalization strategy should be monitoring and controlling in order to redirect the activities when necessary. (FNBE & CIMO & HAMK 2009, 20.) In this research, also the importance of internationalization strategy, resourcing the international activities and developing the quality and feedback systems for expanding the international experiences and competencies was emphasized. The research disclosed recommendations to educational providers for improving the international activities and further planning the future in internationalization. The recommendations emphasize e.g. the importance of internationalization strategy with practical goals and actions connected to the real operations of institutes. Furthermore, the development of steering and the actual descriptions of resources for international operations should be included in the strategy. The contents and quality of international activities should have a greater significance than the growth and volume of these activities. Moreover, the internationalization of institutes' working life partners should be considered as a possibility for the future changes in operational environments. In addition, home-based internationalization should be strengthened by exploiting the incoming exchange students and the equality of student mobility should be enabled by accentuated the role of teachers. Pedagogically planned international education for students, e.g. international theme weeks and events and recognition of international skills and knowledge should be developed, utilizing EQF and ECVET-systems. (FNBE & CIMO & HAMK 2009, 28 - 37.)

As recommendations to the support organizations, the National Board of Education and the Centre for International Mobility, in the research were stated that vocational institutes

require support and further training for internationalization from the support organizations. Particularly, in accordance with project funding, the simplification of it was needed. Furthermore, guidance and training for the funding application processes and versatile finding possibilities were required. The requisition of general national internationalization strategy for vocational education was recommended for designing effective and functional strategies within institutes. Moreover, the consideration of geographical distances in the mobility funding was presented as a one recommendation for support organization. From Northern Finland the travelling costs to international airports to the southern part of the country are substantial. (FNBE & CIMO & HAMK 2009, 40 - 41.) The results and further recommendations of the research by FNBE, CIMO and HAMK will be taken into consideration in the analysis phase of this research, in chapter 4.

An essential and necessary tool for the development of internationalization in vocational education is a functional and realistic strategy, which is created according the actual operations, realistic objectives and future vision for international operations of the institute. The strategy comprises the practical arrangements to achieve the strategic objectives. Furthermore, internationalization strategy should be aligned with the strategy of the institution. According to Finnish National Board of Education (2010, 10), the purpose of strategy for internationalization is to make the international activities widely perceptible and establish them as a part of standard operations of the institute. Therefore, the participation of staffs and students should be involved in this strategy process. Furthermore, commitment, participation and support of management are necessary in order to enable the implementation of the strategy. The wider participation and commitment of staffs into international operations increase the impressiveness of the operations. An essential method for promoting internationalization in vocational education is linking international operations to teaching and counseling, hence the important target group, students, are attained. (FNBE 2010, 18.) The main operational activity of internationalization of vocational institutes is student mobility. However, mobility of management and staffs promotes achieving the objectives of internationalization strategy in vocational institutes, since staffs' attitudes, language skills and commitment to international activities have an essential impact. (FNBE 2010, 23.) The importance of internationalization strategy in

vocational education will be discussed further in the next sub-chapter, wherein Cimo's research results of the topic are presented.

As discussed in the previous sub-chapter, recognizing and acknowledging qualifications in vocational education in one of the main focuses in the new strategy for education. "ECVET as a concept is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification." In the terms on the implementation of ECVET there are two wider goals, i.e. promoting transnational mobility in the European Union and facilitating lifelong learning. The purpose of ECVET is to promote mobility, utilize international learning achievements as a part of vocational qualification and increase the transparency of qualifications. Furthermore, the ECVET system promotes the mobility after studies, applying for jobs abroad. Since the competences obtained in different systems is described in line with the European Qualifications Framework, i.e., knowledge, skills and competence, it is easier for an employer to understand the competence provided by qualifications in different European countries. Thus, a joint understanding of the competence obtained and the learning outcomes achieved in another country can be formed by the representatives of different countries. (FNBE 2012, 11.) The credit transfer system promotes the mutual understanding of competences assessed abroad or by other education provider than one's own. Herewith, the competences can be more perceptible and easier to recognize. Therefore, contemplating international student exchange, the student and the education provider have a common comprehension about the completed studies during the exchange, thus these studies can be utilized as a part of qualification. (FNBE 2012, 12.)

The implementation of ECVET is beneficial to the student/learner, the education provide and working life. The benefits are discussed as long-term benefits. The benefits for students are introduced as improving the possibilities to enrich students' professional competencies, eliminating overlaps in credits for learning outcomes and assessment, facilitating validations and recognitions on previously assessed competencies in national and transnational mobility, promoting the visibility of individual learning opportunities including internationalization in students' study plan. Moreover, the ECVET enables improving the quality of mobility and a common language describing students'

competencies facilitates job-hunting abroad. In addition, by ECVET the recognition of key competencies for lifelong learning acquired during mobility periods will be enhanced and the demonstration and assessment of students' vocational skills will be improved. (FNBE 2012, 12.)

The education provider benefits the EVCET by e.g., developing methodical quality assurance by Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between sending and hosting institution, enhancing trust in partners' ability to assess learning outcomes of the students. Furthermore, the assessment and recognition practices will be clarified and the assessment of benefits in internationalization and international exchange will be facilitated. Uniform procedures for the recognition of competencies assessed elsewhere and the planning and implementation of assessment of learning outcomes will be elaborated. (FNBE 2012, 13.)

The benefits for the employer are stated as a possibility for receiving employees with more diverse competence. Due to the common description method of competences employers easier understand and validate competences acquired and assessed e.g. abroad. (FNBE 2012, 13.)

Mutual trust and partnership between vocational institutions are required and moreover are the foundation for EVCET system to be successfully implemented in vocational education. The Memorandum of Understanding, agreed and signed between institutions provides a general framework for cooperation and networking. Furthermore, it defines the responsibilities of parties and further objectives for cooperation.

At the moment, vocational institutes in Finland have been informed and trained in order to start utilizing the principles of ECVET. However, official implementation requires national decisions and changes to regulations, which not have been completed yet. Finnish education system is going to adapt the ECVET-system during 2014. Hence the adapting and successful implementation of EVCET can be disclosed as a very topical method of internationalization of vocational education. The preparation of ECVET-system in Lappia will be presented in chapter 2.3. Moreover, the prerequisites for implementing the system will be contemplated in the analyzing phase of this research.

2.2.2 Supporting role of the Centre of International Mobility to internationalization of vocational education and training

The Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) is a Finnish organization, established in 1991, for promoting international mobility and cooperation. CIMO provides expertise and grants financial support for international projects applied by Finnish general and vocational institutes as well as higher education. In this research the focus is in vocational education. International projects in vocational education are funded by CIMO from EU programs, as Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Nordplus and Grundtvig. According to CIMO's strategy 2020 (2012, 4), the strategic objective for internationalization is Finland to be "a genuinely international, multicultural and creative knowledge society." Mobility and international competences are beheld as essential methods to increasing knowledge and promoting creativity of individuals and society (CIMO 2012, 8). As previously discussed, the publications, research and statistics conducted by CIMO supporting the theoretical framework of this research, are presented hereafter.

As stated earlier according to the National Board of Education, internationalization strategy with well-defined objectives is an essential tool developing internationalization of the vocational institutes. However, even the best strategy needs a realizer. The internationalization of vocational education is promoted by the most active teachers and representatives of management as well as members of the international team of the institutes. Only few members of staff in organizations have international competences, although these competences should concern the whole organization. Therefore international knowhow is still vulnerable operation of the organizations. (Korkala 2012a, 20.) According to Korkala (2012a, 26), contemplating promotion internationalization in different counties in

Finland, the factors presented below are found to be significant in this factual context:

- 1) Setting the objectives and regular monitoring attainment of the objectives in internationalization
- 2) Positive attitudes and activity among the staff towards internationalization

- 3) Collaboration with e.g. universities of applied sciences and communal youth operations
- 4) Ensuring continuity of internationalization with stabile financing (besides project funding)
- 5) Maintaining competences and equal regional operational preconditions, noticing limitedness of language skills and poor traffic communication. (Korkala 2012a, 26.)

The most significant factors enhancing motivation into internationalization are development of education and promoting international trade. Regardless of the fact that strategies determine guidelines for the international operations, without staffs' motivation and positive attitude, it is impossible to execute the strategies. (Korkala 2012a, 26.) Moreover, adequate operational prerequisites and recourses for executing the strategy are worth attention. The internationalization strategy of Lappia will be contemplated in sub-chapter 2.3 and further, the impact and possible suggestions for development of the strategy will be taken into consideration while analyzing the results of this research.

Networking in internationalization has a significant role in order to promote international activities. Networks are defined as an established vocational collaboration between institutes and other organization, with a minimum of three actors (Korkala 2010a, 3). According to CIMO's statistics in 2009, 42 % of vocational institutes participated into international networks. (Korkala 2010a, 5). According to Korkala (2010a, 14), 91 % of networks participated in the study stated that networking have a significant impact on international operations of vocational education. The most important benefit was the growth of student and staff mobility and moreover the facilitation of organizing of the mobility. Staff mobility enabled by networks promotes the success of student mobility. Preparations before students' on-the-job-learning periods abroad executed by the teachers of home institute cooperating with foreign partners ensure the quality and success of periods for students. In addition, cooperation in networks has a positive influence when applying finance for the international activities for institutes. This collaboration facilitates the distribution of costs and responsibilities between the actors in international projects. Moreover, sharing the knowledge and experiences, learning from each other within the network and transfer of good practices were stated as significant benefits for this

collaboration. Obtaining new foreign partners into international activities through networks can also be acknowledged as an essential benefit. (Korkala 2010a, 14.) Significance and justification of networking in international operations for Lappia will be addressed in chapter 2.3. Furthermore, the importance of collaboration in international networks will be discussed in chapter 4.

According to Riitaoja (2007, 8), teachers' mobility in VET is an important method to enhance internationalization process in institutes. Sharing and distributing teachers' new, international knowledge and experience obtained during international periods support the internationalization of institutes and further promote the quality of teaching. The international mobility of persons is one of the basic objectives in the European Union. Through this method of mobility the aim is to establish a "European knowledge area" with cultural and economic objectives. (Riitaoja 2007, 10.) In Riitaoja's research when contemplating the results of motivation and benefits going international periods, participants of vocational education adduced the importance of supporting internationalization and international contacts of their educational units. In addition, supporting student mobility and international project collaboration were emphasized. Furthermore, new ideas from international experience for utilizing in own teaching methods were emphasized among the participants of the research. Hence, personal and professional development had significance. Moreover, comparing educational and operational methods and increasing the interest of students and staff towards other cultures and herewith international activities in institute were seen important among respondents. Several participants of this research accentuated improvement of language skills and creating or enhancing international contacts as well as gaining interesting experience in multicultural and international teaching. (Riitaoja 2007, 53 - 58.)

According to Riitaoja (2007, 64), the key prerequisites of a successful training period abroad are support by superior and management level, flexible assignments of duties in home unit, support by training provider and colleagues at home unit, opportunity to make new contacts abroad, good language skills and intercultural competencies. Furthermore, functional practical arrangements for the period and contribution to the international work

of home institution were stated as key prerequisites of successful international experience (Riitaoja 2007, 64).

Riitaoja (2007, 69) presented the problems concerning international mobility among teachers as; accumulation of working tasks before and after the mobility period, organizing the tasks during the period, arrangement of substitute, fitting in the period in working schedule, finding proper time for the period, financing the period, tribulations in cooperation with receiving organization in preplanning, family issues, inadequacy of language skills. According to CIMO (2009, 14), the strongest obstacles among teachers and staff for increased participation in promoting internationalization were addressed as the costs of hiring a substitute for a teacher leaving for a mobility period. These costs are currently not covered by the EU funding. Moreover, in VET institutions the hiring of substitutes is paid from municipal budgets and these have been adversely affected by the current economic recession. (CIMO 2009, 14.) The above presented benefits, motivation, prerequisites and problems with possible resemblances or discrepancies will be compared to the results of this thesis in the analysis chapter 4.

According to the survey about experiences of Nordic student and teacher exchanges conducted by Rahikainen (2009, 10), the benefits for participation in international teacher mobility were presented as getting acquainted with educational systems, teaching methods and the field of study in another Nordic country. Moreover, creating contacts and possibilities for cooperation, meeting colleagues and learning new methods of teaching and practices as well as developing professional skills and operational culture in own institute appeared as benefits. In addition, the culture of destination country and language skills as reasons for participation was presented. As a conclusion, teachers valued the experience of international exchange for improving professional competencies. (Rahikainen 2009, 14.) Challenges for the Nordic mobility periods were inadequate language skills, the practical preparations and arrangements of the trip and lack of finance issued from the scantiness of the mobility grant. Furthermore, creating contacts during the exchange period and maintain the contacts after it, as well as organizing own work and a substitute during the period were stated as challenges. (Rahikainen 2009, 17.) The results of the surveys disclosed that the impacts of the periods and enthusiasm of the participated teachers support the future

development of teacher exchange. The essential benefits of the Nordic exchange program were stated as increased international contacts and new agreements for future collaboration. (Rahikainen 2009, 29.)

Statistical information of international mobility is a part of theory of this thesis. It constructs a solid basis for comparison of mobility development during recent years and also justifies with increasing mobility figures the need for promoting the activity in internationalization of VET. CIMO collects and publishes the statistical information of student and staff mobility annually. These statistics include both outbounding and incoming mobility and are collected from every vocational institute in Finland. With this statistical information the current state and quantity of international mobility is perceived. Students' international mobility consists of studies or on-the-job learning periods abroad, in addition short study visits abroad are also presented in these statistics. The purpose of exchange for teachers and staff are work placements, teaching exchange and trips related to international development projects or preparatory visits. The length of periods varies from two weeks to two months for students and from one to two weeks for teachers and staff. Study visits generally last 3-5 days. The statistics of student mobility are presented here also, since the increasing volume of the student mobility is the reason and further the motivation for promoting teacher and staff mobility.

In this research the latest national statistical information of international mobility is collected from 2012. Considering development of student mobility during 2006 – 2012, in 2006 the amount of the students were 4492, whereas the number of in 2012 was 6259 students. The number of incoming students in 2006 was 2059, while in 2012 it was 2453. General view of teacher and staff mobility shows that in 2006 1601 staff members participated into international mobility programs; in 2012 the amount of outbounding staff was 1521, whereas the volume of incoming teachers and staff mobility were in 2006 1733 and in 2012 3403. (Korkala 2013, 8-9.) As a conclusion, contemplating mobility in VET can be stated, that the student and staff mobility has increased during the reviewing period.

According to Korkala (2013, 5), the majority of student mobility, i.e. 95 % consist of on-the-job learning periods abroad. Reviewing the purpose of teacher and staff mobility, trips

related to collaborative development projects and preparatory visits constitute the majority of the mobility, whereas teaching exchange and working placement represents the minority of the purpose in mobility (Korkala 2013, 5). The mobility statistics of Lappia will be reviewed in chapter 2.3 of this research.

2.3 Comparison: Present stage and future prospects of internationalization in Lappia and Internationalization strategy of Lappia

In this chapter the current situation and future prospects of internationalization in Vocational College Lappia are presented according to the internationalization strategy of Lappia, which sets the objectives and directs the operations in international activities of the institute. This strategy is constructed by the internationalization team and accredited by the management team of the college. Furthermore, the theories and results from previous research presented above, relevant for implementation and development Lappia's internationalization strategy and the present and future international operations, are discussed. Moreover, exploitation of my working experience as international relations coordinator of Lappia is taken into consideration in this depiction.

The Ministry of Education and Culture defines the objectives for internationalization of VET. These objectives, increasing the mobility, promoting project work and implementation of ECVET, have been taken into consideration in Lappia, while constructing the internationalization strategy. Furthermore, the strategy of the college defines the basis for the internationalization strategy. Hence, international activities are a significant part of Lappia's operations. According to the internationalization strategy by strengthening the internationalization of the college the possibilities for students and staff for acting in the international working life are supported. The vision for the internationalization is defined as follows: "Lappia is a trustworthy and international partner, whose students and staffs have adequate competences to act skillfully in the international environments of the future." (Vocational College Lappia 2012, 1.) The main operational activities of the internationalization are student and staff mobility. Moreover, developing the education is implemented by acting in international project work. The objectives of internationalization in Lappia are defined to meet the requirements of international working

life by updating curricula and providing possibilities for students to accomplish a part of their qualifications abroad. In addition, increasing the international competences of the staff and developing national and international networking are presented as objectives of promoting internationalization. Furthermore, ensuring versatile international project activities in every field of study and monitoring the development of above-mentioned objectives are stated to be the strategic goals. (Vocational College Lappia 2012, 2.)

The operation plan of internationalization strategy defines the measures, which enables the accomplishment of the objectives. In Lappia's strategy the measures are indicated as including the international requirements for international professional skills to the contents of curricula and promoting the implementation of ECVET/EFQM and Europass for recognizing and acknowledging the qualifications accomplished abroad. Moreover, offering possibilities for the staff to study foreign languages and participate in internationalization at the home institution. Promoting the international network operations in Lappia the active participation in Russian, Canada and other national or international networks is encouraged. Lappia apply annually for funding to start operating in new study field-specific international networks. Furthermore, to enhance the home-based internationalization, Lappia actively act as a hosting partner for foreign students and experts. Ensuring the monitoring of the development in internationalization, Lappia is including internationalization as a part of the financial and operational plan of the institute. In addition, students' participation in the International Skills Competition is promoted. (Vocational College Lappia 2012, 2.)

The internationalization strategy determines the resources for implementation international operations in the college. In Lappia, these operations are managed by the director of studies and responsible for implementation and development of operations is international relations coordinator of the institute. Furthermore, representatives from every field of study are intensely involved in internationalization team; hence they also have a significant role for promoting internationalization of the college and especially in their own study field. (Vocational College Lappia 2012, 3.) No students are appointed as a member of this group. As stated in Koramo's (2012, 8) report and Korkala's (2012, 19) survey, the adequate resources enables the internationalization of the institute. In Lappia, these resources are

defined in general terms. Nevertheless, the transparent roles of every actor in internationalization are missing in the strategy. However, these roles are depicted in the process description of international operations in Lappia. This description of international processes presents the purpose of the internationalization and responsibilities of actors in the international operations. The actors are the management and internationalization team of the college, teachers, staff and students in Lappia. Moreover, the responsibilities of the network partners are defined. These processes also describe the practices of student and staff mobility and further the prevailing practice in international project work. These descriptions cover all the operations of the college and they have been constructed and accredited by the Board of Lappia as a part of the quality system of Lappia.

For the implementation and development of international operations Lappia will allocate adequate financial and operational resources. Furthermore, versatile funding programs for VET internationalization will be utilized. (Vocational College Lappia 2012, 3.) At the present moment, there are 9 external approved funding programs for international projects in Lappia and for the next semester 10 more projects have been applied for. These projects include both student and teacher mobility for developing the internationalization of Lappia in every field of study, including adult education. These projects are funded by the Finnish National Board of Education and the Centre for International Mobility. Moreover, Lappia provides, to some extent, funding for student and staff mobility; however, previously presented external financing mainly covers the financing for mobility.

The significance of networking in internationalization of VET was presented previously in this chapter. Lappia's internationalization strategy as well as the practical international operations of the college supports this statement. Each international project of Lappia is a network project at the moment. During the past few years, this mode of operations has been increasing substantially. In 2007, there were 6 international network projects in Lappia, whereas in 2014 the number of existing networks is 9. The advantages; promoting and ensuring the quality of student and staff mobility, sharing knowledge and experiences and obtaining new partners, for working in networks for the internationalization of Lappia are approved and exploited.

Previously stated as recommendations to the support organizations, the National Board of Education and the Centre for International Mobility, vocational institutes require support and further training for internationalization from the support organizations. Lappia receive satisfactorily support and guidance from these organizations for operating internationally and developing the activities for internationalization. Particularly guidance and training for the funding application processes and versatile funding possibilities are important for Lappia's internationalization operations. The coordinators and actors of international projects and operations obtain knowledge and skills for administering and executing the operations during various national seminars organized by the support organizations.

Annually the representatives of Lappia's international actors participate in various internationalization seminars in Finland and furthermore, in the European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (EFVET) seminar abroad, this year 2014 in Portugal. Moreover, several international preparatory visits and projects meetings in Finland and abroad are participated into. These seminars strengthen international cooperation between institutes and individuals, and new possibilities and partners for international collaboration are to be found. By means of these seminars the prerequisites for increasing staffs' international competences and strengthen the field-specific networking in internationalization are improved. Lappia is a member of EFVET and International Vocational Education and Training Association (IVETA).

Monitoring and evaluating the objectives and the implementation of international operations is significant for updating the strategy. This updating is done annually by the internationalization team of the college. The quantitative and qualitative indicators of internationalization processes in Lappia are student and staff mobility, the international competences of the staffs, international competitions for students and their training for this competitions, international projects and home-based internationalization. These indicators measure the volume of participation of the students and staffs into these activities. As an explanation is adduced, the international competences of the staffs are measured by their participation in international preparatory visits and project work. Furthermore, international projects are measured by the funding applied for international project work and home-based internationalization consist of incoming foreign and immigrant students. The mobility

statistics collected by CIMO enables the comparison in national level. (Vocational College Lappia 2012, 4.) According to Koramo (2012, 8), internationalization strategy should include the realistic, practical operations, not only visions for internationalization. Moreover, the future prospects for internationalization, derived from the impacts and influences of the changing educational environment, should be considered. In Lappia's internationalization strategy has realistic, practical operations with objectivity for development. However, the future prospects could be illustrated increasingly accurately. This addendum of opportunities can be recognized as a development process for internationalization strategy.

Implementing ECVET (The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) in Lappia is a topical subject currently. In many international projects on stream, ECVET has an important influence. Evaluating principles for achieving learning outcomes, i.e. knowledge, skills and competence are utilized in student mobility of Lappia. Learning agreements for on-the-job-learning periods have been evolved according to the ECVET evaluating principals and the Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with our Spanish partner. Several training and education seminars for implementation of ECVET have been organized during recent years 2011-2013. However, official, national decisions for ECVET are not valid and therefore the development work and preparations will continue. Particularly, in the implementation of ECVET process the contribution of teachers and staff is substantial. Furthermore, this does not concern just internationalization, but the whole educational operations of VET in Europe.

A Peer Review project has been executed in Lappia in 2012. This project was funded by the National Board of Education and partners are representatives of four different vocational colleges in Finland; Kainuu Vocational College, Luovi Vocational College, Keskuspuisto Vocational College and Vocational College Lappia. In this project the objective is to develop the performances of colleges in the field of internationalization. Peer review is an external evaluation method which aims to highlight the strengths and areas for improvement in international activities. In this particular project every college was evaluated and furthermore every college acted as an evaluator for the partner college. In addition, the self-evaluation of international operations was accomplished by every college

involved in the project. In Lappia, this review was participated by teachers and staff with less international experience, and therefore this was a good method for increasing the visibility of internationalization in the college. In the project the targets of evaluation were student mobility, expert mobility and international operations. In Lappia the student mobility was evaluated. Relevant results for this thesis of the project will be presented in analysis chapter of the thesis.

The latest published statistical information of international mobility in Lappia is collected from 2012. Figure 1 describes the volume of the mobility during 2009-2012.

| Year | Outbounding students | Incoming students | Outbounding staff | Incoming staff |
|------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 2012 | 73 | 45 | 88 | 32 |
| 2011 | 74 | 16 | 36 | 20 |
| 2010 | 69 | 12 | 21 | 22 |
| 2009 | 60 | 13 | 33 | 17 |

Figure 1. International mobility in Lappia, 2009-2012 (Korkala 2010b, 43; 2011, 52; 2012b, 54; 2013, 37.)

In conclusion, contemplating the statistics the growth of international mobility can be seen during past four years in Lappia. In proportion in 2012 outbounding staff mobility increased considerably due to various international projects in Lappia. Furthermore, fluctuation of international student mobility is dependent abundantly on external project financing in Lappia as well as in Lappia's international partners. Thus, it can be noticed that financing or lack of it has more notable impact on mobility participation than motivation of students and staff.

Currently Lappia is preparing for the cut down of study places during forthcoming years. By 2016, there will be a reduction of 365 study places in the college. The belt-tightening of operations will be implemented. This phenomenon will be affecting all the operations in Lappia, including internationalization. How exactly this will affect international operations,

it is not in public domain yet. Presumably, the volume of mobility will decrease and further participation in international projects may diminish.

The present stage of internationalization in Lappia will be presented and analyzed also in chapter 4. This depiction will be composed of the respondents' answers of the questionnaire used and participant observation in this thesis. Moreover, the comparison between the prevailing situation according to the internationalization strategy and the observation of the researcher and the actual situation based on the respondents of this research will be explained.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodological choices of this research are discussed and justified below. Furthermore, data collection and data analysis method are expounded on.

3.1 Research methodology

The methodology used in this research is qualitative case study which investigates a prevailing phenomenon in a real-life context. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005, 110) stated that qualitative method for research emphasises observations in natural settings as well as understanding of the respondent's perspective. Moreover, holistic perspective and process orientation is recognised as features in qualitative method. The method pursues also understanding and disclosing an unknown phenomenon and human behaviour in certain contexts. According to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, 25), case studies emphasize the rich, real-world context and theories built from cases are regarded "most interesting". Furthermore, well done theory building from cases is considered an objective, because theory has a close adherence to the data, which keeps researchers honest.

These perspectives presented above support the aims in this research, studying an organization and individuals. In this case study, the real-world context is international operations in the Vocational College Lappia, in which the phenomena under analysis are researched. The objective of the research is not only to explore the phenomena i.e. participation into international activities, but to understand the reasons for certain behaviours in this context.

However, using theory building from cases have to consider that there is a temptation to build theory which tries to capture and interpret everything with itemized results, while lacking the simplicity of overall perspective (Eisenhardt 1989, 547). By studying the results of the research thoroughly considering a research focus and contemporaneously building an understanding in wider context of the phenomena is significant, and thereby building a theory with a holistic perspective is possible. Furthermore, Eisenhardt (1898, 548)

maintains that theories developed from case studies have empirical validity derived from close linkage with empirical evidence in real-life context.

3.2 Data collection methods

According to Yin (2003, 83), the data for case studies can be collected from various established sources of evidence. Six important sources of evidence are presented as follows: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. The benefits from these six sources of evidence can be maximized if the researcher follows three principles. The three principles which help maintain reliability and validity throughout the research process are as follows: using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence. (Yin 2003, 97-105.) However, there is always a certain objectivity problem when the researcher is a part of the case organization. In such a research situation, it is even highly important to carefully consider the reliability, validity and objectivity of the theory built during the research process. Personal relationships and attitudes within the organization may have influence on the answers of the interviewees or respondents. Moreover, a possibility of “wanted” answers may occur; herewith respondents give the answers they think the researcher wants to have.

According to Eisenhardt (1898, 534), typical data collection methods in case studies are archives, interviews, questionnaire and observation. In this study the data was provided by a Webropol-questionnaire submitted to the personnel of Lappia and by participant-observation in an international project and team meetings of the college.

The questionnaire used in this research was a self-administrated questionnaire completed by respondents. These types of questionnaires are administrated using the Internet or Intranet, posted to respondents as mail questionnaires (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2007, 356). Saunders et al. (2007, 357) present a variety of factors, which influences to the choice of a questionnaire. While constructing the questionnaire, the researcher must consider to whom the questionnaire is addressed, the possibility of receiving undistorted

answers, size of sample for analysis, and type and number of questions for collecting data for the research.

The unstructured questionnaire was sent by using email to 40 persons from the college; among this target group there were both active and less active persons in internationalization of the college. A total of 26 responses were received. While designing the questions, the fact that all the respondents might not have been familiar with internationalization was taken into consideration. Besides the research questions presented in chapter 1, the following four questions were asked in the questionnaire: “What are the international activities in the vocational college Lappia?”, “What should these activities be?”, “Have you participated in international activities; if yes how?” and “What are the other development suggestions for international staff of the college you would like to provide?” On the basis of the responses to the question above, the aim was to disclose how well internationalization of the college is known and understood and how staff have participated, if so, in the activities. Moreover, general suggestions for development were asked for. The questionnaire is presented in appendix 1 of this thesis.

Kumar states (2005, 130) that questionnaires save human resources, time and financial resources and therefore using this method of data collection is widely used, especially when it is used to reach a large number of respondents. Furthermore, Kumar (2005, 130) adds that a questionnaire offers anonymity, which is necessary when obtaining accurate, sensitive and genuine information. Ghauri & Grönhaug (2005, 126) suggest that in exploratory studies, an unstructured questionnaire should be used to ensure discovering insights and ideas instead of their causal relationships. In this study, responses were received relatively quickly, within 2 weeks and according to the responses, they were quite honest and mainly constructive. The responses will be discussed and analysed in detail in the chapter 4. This study is exploring the possibilities to improve Lappia’s staffs’ participation into international activities. Therefore, open-ended questions in the questionnaire were justified for obtaining versatile suggestions for improving the situation and disclosing barriers for participation.

As was discussed in the previous sub-chapter, another method for collecting primary data in this research was participant observation. Participant observation means that one, as a researcher, participates in the activities as a group member, not as an outsider observer. Members of the group can be observed with or without their knowing to be observed.

According to Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005, 120), in utilizing participant observation the main advantage is to obtain first-hand information in a natural situation. Furthermore, capturing behaviour in a social context and interpreting and understanding attitudes and situation is more accurate than using questionnaires or interviews. However, using the participant observation as sources of evidence, the challenge is revealing the relevant evidence and information for the research. These observation situations can be challenging and there could be a possibility obtaining unreliable information, since observations may change the behaviour of the individual, when they are aware of the fact that they are being observed. The Hawthorne effect may occur and that can affect seriously the results of the observation; what is observed might not represent normal behaviour. (Kumar 2005, 120.)

In this research participation of the researcher is a natural part of the situation resulting from the current researcher's employment relationship to the organization under analysis. Moreover, researcher works in internationalization of the organization, therefore attending into research situations; international project meetings, team meetings and workshops is natural and justified. Further, discussions with representatives of the staff for promoting internationalization are essential part of researcher's work. The observations for collecting data into this research took place during spring 2012, 2013 and autumn 2012.

As was indicated when discussing observations as a data collecting method, the exploitation of the data originated from the researcher's working experience is used in this study. Furthermore, the experience of the colleagues of partner vocational institutes in Finland and abroad for obtaining some comparison material for this study is utilized. In addition, international projects in Lappia and the results and evaluations of these projects facilitate analysing the results of this study.

3.3 Data analysis method

The aim of analysing the data is to publish new information of the situation under research. According to Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005, 204), qualitative research generally provides the researcher a huge amount of data to analyse. Moreover, the data has to be interpreted in order to become information. Quantitative data are mostly numeric, while qualitative data is non-standardized and requires classification into categories (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 204). Kumar (2005, 240) states that for analysing the qualitative data, the process called content analysis is needed. This means analysing of the contents of the interview or questionnaire in order to identify the main themes that emerge from the respondents' answers. To some extent, the main themes can be created while constructing the questionnaire as well as executing the interviews. The importance of objectivity, as stated in the previous sub-chapter, of the researcher and validity of the emergent information should be emphasized at this stage. In this research, the main themes were incorporated into research questions.

Analysing case study evidence, general analytic strategy, which defines the priorities of the analysing process, is essential. Utilizing the strategy facilitates the understanding of what to analyse and why. (Yin, 2003, 111.) In this study, the data was analysed using the strategy of relying on theoretical propositions. The analysis was implemented and the results were interpreted in accordance with the theory of this research. Yin (2003, 112) adds that theoretical orientation guides this case study analysis. Furthermore, the proposition facilitates focusing attention to the relevant data and organizing the entire case study (Yin 2003, 112). Therefore, using the strategy of relying on theoretical propositions enables keeping in mind the focus of the entire research.

Yin (2003, 116 – 137) adduces five different specific analytic techniques for the process of analysing the data, i.e. pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. In this research, the technique of explanation building is used as a method of analysis. The aim is by studying the data to build an explanation about the case. Moreover, the aim of this analytic technique is not conclude the study but to

develop ideas for further study (Yin 2003, 120). Furthermore, Yin (2003, 120) suggests that this procedure is pertinent for explanatory case studies. These perspectives of further study and explanatory case study support this research and the process of analysing as well. Internationalization of operations in Lappia should continuously develop; hence further studies on this subject are suggested.

4 ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter 4 presents the main findings of this research. The subchapters are built according to the questionnaire used. The first subchapter adduces the current stage of internationalization in Lappia according to the respondents. The main research questions reveal the barriers for participation in the second subchapter. The suggestions for promoting the participation in the international activities of the college are disclosed in third subchapter. The final subchapter presents suggestion for further development for internationalization according to the respondents. The Webropol-questionnaire was sent to 40 employees. To ensure having responses beneficial to this research, the majority of the employee with some interest or opinion in internationalization were selected as respondents. A total of 26 responses were received, 7 of respondents representing management, 11 representing teachers and 8 for administrative staff. The questionnaire is presented in appendix 1 of this research.

Besides the questionnaire, another way of collecting the data for this research was participant observation by the researcher. The participant observations took place during international team meetings, project meetings and workshops in spring 2012, 2013 and autumn 2012, and 2013, as well as during the researcher's day-to-day work as an international coordinator in Lappia. Moreover, discussions with the staff about the internationalization of the college conducted by the researcher were a part of the data collection. Results from the observations are presented in each subchapter of this analysis part of the study. The responses to the questionnaire and the results of participant observations are compiled into relevant entirety in every subchapter.

4.1 Results of the research

4.1.1 Present stage of internationalization of Lappia

Revealing the present stage of internationalization is not a main objective in this study. However, in my opinion, it is necessary to have a collective opinion of the respondents' insight of the international activities and the stage of internationalization of Lappia.

Furthermore, suggestions for developing internationalization and current participation degree into international activities are revealed. This kind of questionnaire has not been executed before in this extend in Lappia, therefore the knowledge of the present stage is important to create a relevant and holistic view of internationalization from the perspective of the staff. The general view facilitates my tasks as an international relations coordinator in developing the internationalization of Lappia and it gives important knowledge and expectations of internationalization for the whole college.

Moreover, comparison between Lappia's internationalization strategy and actual, current international operations in the college according by respondents affords an interesting perspective to find out how these operations are in line with the strategy. These observations will be disclosed in this chapter.

First question in this research for revealing the current stage of internationalization in Lappia was "What are the international activities of our college?" A total of 26 responses were given to this question. According to the respondents internationalization in Lappia was perceived as obtaining mobility placements for the students and the staff. Furthermore, maintaining the current contacts and procuring new partners for international cooperation and projects activities was stated as main international operations in Lappia. Moreover, WorldSkills, annual international vocational skills competition for students, were mentioned as a part of international operations. The present stage of internationalization was described as active project performances and mobility. In addition, receiving incoming foreign students and staff was noticed as a functional method of internationalization as well as the foreign students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences at the same campus. Furthermore, internationalization in Lappia was described as modern and forward-looking activity with consideration of the challenges of today (23 answers). One respondent answered not being aware of these activities. According to one respondent there was no consistency in use of financing in Lappia, without project funding there was no international activities at all. One respondent pointed out that internationalization was active in Lappia, except in cultural sector.

Responses to this first question show that the majority of respondents are aware of the international activities in Lappia and consider them active and functional. Only one respondent was not familiar with them. As a researcher, I was positively surprised that respondents gave extensive and accurate information about Lappia's international operations. According to the participant observations during the research process, results from it were in line with the responses to the questionnaire. International activities mainly consist of student and staff mobility and active collaboration with foreign partners ensures the mobility and development of it. Furthermore, the situation of cultural sector has been challenging, i.e. students and the majority of teachers are interested in mobility periods or other international activities, but they do not have the managerial support needed. Financial issues in internationalization have been emerged in several situations, e.g. without external funding international operations have been diminishing continuously.

Second question was "What should these activities be in your opinion?" A total of 24 answers were given to this question. The majority of the responses disclosed that prospective international activities were considered as the mobility of students and staffs. According to the respondents the visibility of international activities should be more perceptible than it is currently (four answers). Furthermore, possibilities for the staff to participate in the activities were not known for some respondents (three answers). In this context, more information about the possibilities in internationalization is needed. Cooperation with the Nordic Countries, emphasizing Sweden should be one focus in international cooperation of Lappia (two answers). One respondent announced that international operations could be more effective, if there were more resources for executing them. Furthermore, according to two respondents students and representatives of staff should be encouraged more to participate in the international activities of the college.

Enhancing possibilities for participation in international activities regarding the administrative staff of the college, besides teachers and international actors, were pointed out as well as equitable possibilities for students' international training periods in every field of studies, regardless the resistance of management (two answers). According to six respondents international activities in Lappia were exactly what is should be, for those who are willing to participate, it is possible. Further, the budget of internationalization should be

defined more accurately. International activities implemented by external financing are not disposable in every study field; therefore in order to ensure the activities, self-financing of internationalization in Lappia's budget should be available (three answers). Cooperation with immigrants and incoming foreign students were mentioned by one respondent as one possible form of internationalization in Lappia. This mode of operation was recognized as a method to strengthen home-based internationalization and enabling the possibilities for several students and representatives of staff become acquainted with foreign cultures. One respondent answered not having an opinion to this question.

According to responses presented above indicates that prospective international activities in Lappia are mostly recognized actual, emphasizing the student and staff mobility. Moreover, the responses adduced that following prospects are in line with the participant observation in this research. More information about the possibilities in internationalization as well as long-span and clearly defined budgeting for active international operations is required. Encouraging the students and staff to participate more actively in internationalization were enounced. Furthermore, more active collaboration with Sweden and the Nordic Countries can be stated as one area for elaborating internationalization. However, to start more active cooperation with the Nordic Countries require resources. Moreover, financing the international activities and to be exact, the lack of financing, seemed to be one actual concern in internationalization in Lappia. International operations are widely based on external financing, although self-financing is needed in order to assure equitable operations in every study field.

Third question in the questionnaire was "Have you participated in international activities; if yes, how?" This question pursued to disclose how many of the respondents have participated in internationalization in Lappia and further what kind of activities they have been engaged with. A total of 26 answers were given to this question. Five of the respondents answered not having participated in any kind of activities. Five of the respondents announced that they are or have been members of the international team in Lappia. These respondents, derived from their team experience, have an extensive perspective of internationalization in Lappia. Team members work closely in internationalization processes, e.g. student, staff mobility and project management. Ten

respondents answered participating in expert exchange periods abroad. Furthermore, hosting foreign visitors were announced as participation in international activity (four answers). Two of the respondents answered acting in the administrative office work of internationalization, e.g. managing financial operations by posting mobility invoices to national or foreign partners.

The majority of the respondents had some experience in international activities. My personal opinion as a researcher was positive, since several of the respondents had participated in international expert periods, international project work, receiving foreign students and visitors or other activities in internationalization. Presumably the respondents with some interest in internationalization of Lappia answered this questionnaire, whereas respondents with no interest or opinion in internationalization did not reply. Nevertheless, the results of this question were more versatile than expected by the researcher.

In conclusion, according to the respondents the present stage of internationalization in Lappia is mostly recognised by activities emphasizing student and staff mobility, both outbounding and incoming mobility. Further, functional collaboration with foreign partners and active project work ensuring the mobility is stated as a relevant part of international activities. International activities are perceived active and functional. However, more information about the possibilities in internationalization is required as well as more active actions for encouraging the student and staff for participation. Moreover, enhancing cooperation with the Nordic Countries is suggested. The majority of the respondents have had some experience in internationalization, e.g. participation in international expert periods or international project work. According to the respondents, the systematic self-financing of internationalization is required, since every study field does not have project financing for the activities. Furthermore, methodical international study field-specific projects are wanted.

Comparison between the prevailing situation in internationalization in Lappia according to the findings in this research and Lappia's internationalization strategy will be adduced hereafter. The comparison shows that the objectives of Lappia's international strategy and current operations in internationalization are aligned to a great extent. Strategic objectives

in internationalization emphasize student mobility by enabling possibilities for students to accomplish a part of their qualifications abroad, meaning on-the-job learning periods of their studies. Moreover, according to the strategy, Lappia pursues increased international competencies of the staff. These both objectives will be attained by developing national and international networking, contemporaneously by attaining versatile international projects in every study field. Regardless of the objective of international projects operating in every study field in the strategy, this aim is not achieved in Lappia. According to the respondents, lack of support and motivation of management and further lack of resources of the staff is stated to be the main reason for this. Furthermore, according to the strategy, the study field-specific financial and operational plan should include international operations. This ensures functional operations without external project financing. However, in Lappia this has not been implemented yet.

4.1.2 Barriers for participation in international activities

The first main question in this research focuses on finding out the obstacles to participation in internationalization among the staff of Lappia. A total of 25 responses were given to this question. Nine of respondents answered that the lack of time and inadequate resources were the barriers for participation. Moreover, insufficient languages skills were stated as one obstacle (four answers). The shortage of motivation and possibilities among the respondents were announced as hindrance for acting in internationalization (four answers). Furthermore, three respondents stated that the absent support of management for participation was seen as a barrier. Other issues that the respondents pointed out were family reasons, illness, becoming tired of own work and lack of information about possibilities for participation in the activities. Furthermore, among respondents were stated that there is not equitable possibilities for participation and internationalization require too much work. One respondent stated that same persons participate constantly, therefore participation is not meant for every staff member. Five respondents announced that there were no barriers for participation.

According to the participant observation in this research, the most significant barriers exposed were the lack of resources and the support of management. Without prerequisites

provided by management, participation is difficult and further impossible in most situations. Especially among the teachers, whose main duty is teaching, was challenging to find time for international activities. Acting in internationalization was seen as time-consuming due to the use of foreign language and the comprehension of cultural aspects. Moreover, internationalization was stated to be the task only for the international team of Lappia, not for all representatives of the staff. The lack of financing was announced as one essential barrier. During the observation in several occasions the substitute arrangements were stated to be a barrier for active participation, especially in the teacher exchange periods, which lasts at a minimum one week. Also according to CIMO (2009, 14), the main obstacles to participation in international mobility is the substitute arrangements. EU funding for mobility is not covering the costs of hiring a substitutes for teachers, thus the costs is covered from the college budget. In the future, while Lappia is facing the consequences of cut down students' study places, external EU funding will have greater importance in enabling the student and staff mobility and the international project work. According to the Peer Review implemented in 2012 in Lappia, the area of internationalization that needs more attention is the financing of the operations. There should be well-defined principles for the applying and using of EU-financing and further self-financing should be perceptible in every study-field.

In conclusion, it is obvious that barriers for participation in international activities in Lappia do exist. The main findings regarding such barriers were stated to be the lack of resources and shortage of motivation and possibilities. In addition, inadequate language skills among respondents were found as a significant hindrance to participation. Moreover, the lack of support from management and shortage of financing was adduced. Findings are in line with Riitaoja's (2007, 69) and CIMO's (2009, 14), research concerning obstacles for participation in international operations. However, the barriers according to the respondents were stated to be quite few comparing to the expectations of the researcher. According to five respondents, no barriers for participation were noticed. Even though the majority of selected respondents were with some opinion or interest in internationalization in Lappia, a wider variety of obstacles were expected to be revealed in this research. On the other hand, the overall situation according to the barriers for participation can be disclosed anticipated, nevertheless the number of barriers exposed was low.

4.1.3 Suggestions for promoting staffs' participation in international activities

The objective of the second main question in this research is to receive suggestions for how to increase the motivation for staff participation in the internationalization of Lappia. A total of 22 suggestions were given in the responses to this question. According to sex respondents, more information about the possibilities for participation was needed and further personal contacts and guidance for the motivation of the staff was required. Information should not be delivered entirely by e-mail, but in staff meetings with face-to-face contact. Moreover, organizing language courses and offering the possibilities for improving language skills by hosting foreign students and experts were announced as methods for promoting participation (three answers). Four respondents stated that adequate resources enable the participation in the international activities.

The role of Lappia's international team was brought up in three responses. The members of the team should have genuine interest for internationalization. The team should be aware of the opinion and proposals of the staff in order to promote the participation. Furthermore, the membership of the team should be based on voluntariness, thus it is assured that motivated persons act for promoting the internationalization of the college.

Other issues that the respondents pointed out were positive attitude towards internationalization through the whole organization and well-defined instructions how to participate in international activities. Moreover, the support of management was stated as an essential prerequisite for more active participation. Possibilities for shorter expert periods abroad were pointed out. Family situations were adduced as a barrier for longer exchange periods for the staff. Usually the period lasts for a week or two weeks, especially two weeks period is too long in most expert mobility cases. According to two respondents, international operations were operated satisfactorily, the international actors of the college are professionals in their work and everybody willing to participate in to these activities has a possibility to do so.

Contemplating the participant observation and my personal experience in this research, similar suggestions than presented above can be stated for promoting the internationalization among the staff. However, higher value for the attitude of management was exposed in order to promote the participation in the internationalization of the college. The management is responsible for resource allocation, without resources enhancing the possibilities for internationalization is difficult or, in most cases, impossible. Reference to the attitude of management did not have significance in the responses to the questionnaire; only two respondents indicated that management has importance in this context. Furthermore, sufficient financing had a great impact on promoting the participation. New ideas for teaching methods gained by international periods were stated as one essential benefit for the teachers. The expansive dissemination of these ideas among the teachers was mentioned to be a good method for the promotion of internationalization and further the professional development of teachers. The exploitation of new ideas through internationalization is in agreement with Riitaoja (2007, 53-58).

In conclusion, the main findings in view of promoting the staffs' participation in internationalization can be stated as increasing the dissemination of information about international possibilities for the staff in Lappia and improving the guidance for participation. Furthermore, the results of the research emphasize the importance of ensuring adequate allocation of resources for participation and more positive attitude through organization in order to facilitate active international participation among the staff. Moreover, the dissemination of information of professional development obtained by international experience was announced.

4.1.4 Suggestions for further development of internationalization in Lappia

The purpose of the final question in the questionnaire was to disclose further proposals from the perspective of the staff for the elaboration of internationalization in the college. A total of 21 responses were given to this question. The significance of information, visibility in internationalization was announced and further dissemination of good practices and personal guidance were stated as a method of development (six answers). According to

three respondents, the adequate resources for international operations were adduced as a prerequisite for promoting internationalization.

Every study field of the college should have a budget for international operations; herewith the operations would not be dependent on external financing and this ensures persistent operations for the benefit of students and staff (three answers). One respondent suggested that the administration of international operations should be changed more to services, not just administrative work, for the staff of the college.

Other suggestions that respondents pointed out were providing more information about the possibilities for the staff to participate in international educations and events organized by financiers. Furthermore, elaborating staffs' attendance in international networks in VET and involving also Lappia's cultural sector in internationalization. Moreover, enhancing the staff participating in internationalization were mentioned, this facilitates the involvement of the highly motivated staff with new ideas for development. Six respondents announced that international operations were administered well in Lappia, activities are versatile and presentable outcomes in internationalization are evident. Further, internationalization in Lappia was stated as a possibility and resource for the college.

Comparing the responses in second main question about promoting staffs' participation and the final question for further development, similarities can be noticed. Information about available possibilities for participation in internationalization as well as financing of international activities was brought up in the responses. Furthermore, the adequate resources and support of management for promoting internationalization were pointed out in both questions.

Concern for financing the operations was pointed out in many responses through the questionnaire. This is justified due to the economy measures based on the cut down of the study places in Lappia during next two years. This reduction of study places affects extensively to the economy of the college. Without external EU funding for mobility projects and other international projects, amount of students and staff participating in internationalization will decrease. On the other hand, while observing the future prospects

of development of internationalization, international operations should have a linkage to the core operations of vocational institutes. Furthermore, while developing international operations as a part of core operations, internationalization should be contemplated also without external financing as a part of budget for core operations in the institute. In Lappia this has not been implemented yet.

According to the participant observation, including my personal observations, for further development of internationalization in Lappia the results were various and versatile. These results indicate that the need for development exists. Contemplating ECVET, without increasing the international abilities of the teachers, utilizing the ECVET-system in internationalization is impossible. Furthermore, the internationalization of curricula, the consequence and prerequisite of ECVET, is extremely difficult to implement without the international skills of the staff.

The importance of international networks and versatile projects were pointed out as a tool for development. Particularly, the networking between the institutes in Northern Finland in international projects was disclosed important. During the past few years, networking in internationalization has increased essentially in Lappia. The benefits of networking have been noticed, e.g. sharing knowledge, experiences and foreign partners and their competences in international projects. A Peer Review project disclosed the importance of networking in Lappia. According to the results of the project Lappia should enhance the participation in national and international networks in order to promote internationalization. The significance of adequate resources for international networking should be emphasized in this context.

Lappia's internationalization strategy defines the realistic guidelines for international operations. One of the reasons for the realism and practicality of the strategy is the fact that strategy is made by the actual actors engaged in the internationalization of the college. However, the future prospects and objectives could be illustrated increasingly accurately. The future prospects for internationalization, derived from the impacts and influences of the changing educational and working environment, should be considered. This ensures to maintain opportunities for Lappia having possibilities for anticipation and reactions in line

with the changing circumstances of the future, while exploring the possibilities for future development in internationalization as an essential part of its operations. The essential factor for the successful internationalization of the college is the motivation and attitude of the management and actors in international operations. Furthermore, adequate operational prerequisites and recourses for executing the strategy and enabling the development are worth attention. Internationalization is not yet an essential part of the strategic operations in Lappia and internationalization strategy is still comprehended quite separately from the core operations. For promoting the staff participation in the internationalization of the college, the strategic development of international operations should have a compact linkage to other strategic focuses in education. Furthermore, internationalization should be a part of quality system of the college, thus the development of internationalization will be ensured. At the moment, Lappia is taking actively part in various projects for promoting quality in teaching and the systems of curricula. Nonetheless, internationalization has not been included in these projects. In order to enhance quality in internationalization, there should be a separate international project for it.

The management team of Lappia has aligned the recommendations for internationalization for the future. The recommendations emphasize the significance of international project work and closer collaboration with Nordic Countries, e.g. Sweden and Norway. In order to start international cooperation with new partners, allocation for sufficient resources is needed. Promoting of teacher participation in internationalization was adduced. By participating in international operations and project work, the development of teaching will be enabled. According to the management team, teachers have an important role in informing about the possibilities for students and thus promoting also the student mobility of the college. For enabling the participation of teachers in internationalization, management should allocate the requisite recourses, encourage and motivate for involvement.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Working life has become internationalized. Furthermore, international mobility has increased. This generates the global labour market, which emphasize international skills and competences. The European Union defines the framework for development of VET and strategies for promoting internationalization. The framework and strategies agreed on at the European level are implemented nationally. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland internationalization is disclosed as an important part of Finnish VET. Vocational education has a significant role in developing the international competitiveness in labour markets. The international competencies of staff, especially of the teachers, are the core factors for the development in this context.

The main objective of this research was to explore the possibilities for promoting staffs' participation in international activities in Lappia. The research questions of the study were addressed to find out the barriers for participation and further the methods how to increase the participation in internationalization of the college. Moreover, in this research the present stage and further development of internationalization of Lappia was disclosed. In order to achieve these objectives, a theoretical framework was built up from the literature and previous research of the internationalization of VET in Europe, in Finland and in Lappia. An empirical study was accomplished by a questionnaire survey and participant observation. The questionnaire was sent to 40 employees of the college and a total of 26 responses were received. The participant observation took place in international project meetings and workshops and further, in discussions with the staff. The results were analysed accordingly in the theoretical framework of this research.

5.1 Discussion of findings

Based on the research results, the present stage of internationalization in Lappia was mostly recognised by student and staff mobility. Moreover, functional collaboration with foreign partners and active project work were disclosed. The international activities of the college were perceived to be active and functional. However, challenges and obstacles for

participation in international activities were adduced. The main findings in view of the factors hindering the participation of internationalization were recognized as comprising the lack of resources and the shortage of motivation and possibilities. In addition, inadequate language skills among the staff were found to constitute an obstacle for internationalization among the respondents. Furthermore, the lack of support from management and the shortage of financing were stated as barriers for participation.

On the basis of the analyses of the findings of this research, it was found out that for promoting staffs' participation in international activities the dissemination of the possibilities for participation should be enhanced. Moreover, improving the guidance for participation was pointed out by respondents. Furthermore, adequate resources for participation and more positive attitude towards internationalization were emphasized. The professional development of the staffs obtained by international experience was recognized as an essential result of internationalization.

The findings of the research demonstrated also that for further development of internationalization in Lappia, there should be more information about the possibilities how to participate in international activities. Moreover, also in this context the importance of adequate resources, e.g. time and financing, and support of management were disclosed. International networking was stated as a prerequisite for the development of internationalization. However, networking is not possible without adequate resources for it. Furthermore, Lappia's internationalization strategy should support the development of the activities with accurate future prospects and objectives.

5.2 Limitations

Some limitations can be recognized considering this research. A limitation concerning this thesis is the objectivity, since the researcher is working closely in internationalization in Lappia. The biased interpretation of the information may have been formed considering researcher's own experience, opinions and expectations in internationalization. Another limitation is the limited amount of respondents. Thus the generalization of the findings is not possible.

5.3 Proposal for future research

Suggestion for further research can be acknowledged. This research was exploring how to promote the participation in the international activities among the staff in Lappia. Interesting and necessary research would be to conduct a research among students in view of how to promote their internationalization opportunities. In the future, the requirements of internationalization among students will increase. However, the reduction of study places affecting the economy of the college will have an impact on internationalization. According to my personal and colleagues' experience, international activities will be among the first operations targeted for economizing. The future challenges in internationalization in Lappia will be to meet the requirements of the students and offer the possibilities in internationalization in the current stringent economic situation.

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APPENDIX 1. International activities of Vocational College Lappia. Questionnaire used in the thesis.

APPENDIX 1

International activities of Vocational College Lappia

1. Do you represent?

- ☐ Management
- ☐ Teaching staff
- ☐ Administrative staff

2. Field of study?

3. What are the international activities of our college?

4. What should these activities be in your opinion?

5. Have you participated in international activities; if yes, how?

6. What are the barriers hindering your participation?

7. What are your suggestions for increase the participation in international activities among the staff?

8. What are the other development suggestions for international staff of our college you would like to bring forward?
